

## cough syrup

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/35001844) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35001844>.

### Rating:

Mature

### Archive Warning:

No Archive Warnings Apply

### Category:

Gen

### Fandom:

Batman (Comics), Red Robin (Comics), Robin (Comics), DCU (Comics), Batman and Robin (Comics)

### Relationship:

Tim Drake & Bruce Wayne, Tim Drake & Damian Wayne, Tim Drake & Dick Grayson, Tim Drake & Jason Todd

### Character:

Tim Drake, Bruce Wayne, Damian Wayne, Alfred Pennyworth, Dick Grayson, Jason Todd

### Additional Tags:

Bruce Wayne Tries to Be a Good Parent, he tries but messes up a bit in the beginning, Tim Drake is So Done, Family Issues, Apologies, Guilt, Bruce Wayne is Bad at Communicating, Tim Drake is Not Okay, does it count as runningaway if you tell people you're leaving?, Middle child syndrome, a lot of issues could be resolved in this family if they all just talked to each other, Tim Drake-centric, Tim Drake Needs a Break, Unreliable Narrator, Tim Drake's Missing Spleen, Pneumonia, Tim Drake & Jason Todd Bonding

### Language:

English

### Collections:

Tim Drake's Missing Spleen, Lady Owl's Extras Library, Leymonaide fic recs, Ashes' Library, TA3 Batman, The Batfamily 2022 Collection, My Best of DC Fics, Best, Qqqqqq115, The Witch's Woods

### Stats:

Published: 2021-11-08 Updated: 2021-12-23 Words: 15,077



# cough syrup

by [DairyFarmer](#)

## Summary

Tim was tired and done.

He didn't deserve this.

"Either Damian goes or I do, take your pick."

Bruce stared at him.

----

Tim reaches his breaking point and presents an ultimatum.

# Chapter 1

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Looking back, Tim didn't even remember what set it all off.

Maybe Damian had broken into his room again and messed with his things.

Maybe he'd stolen Tim's case files and tried to usurp his territory again.

Maybe he'd made a snide comment in front of board members, business partners, or polite company.

Maybe it was one or maybe it was all.

Maybe Tim had just been having a hard day and that set it all rolling.

"Do something about this. *Now* ." Tim ordered. Ordered. He wasn't sitting around and waiting for something to be done. He was *telling* and *expecting* for it to be.

Damian spit something up at him with such vigor Tim could see his spittle fly through the air before continuing to try and tug himself away from him.

Tim stared up at Bruce, without the cowl there were grey bags hanging low under his eyes. Tim could see a spot on his cheek that he'd missed shaving.

Damian squirmed under his hand. Tim had his fist clenched tightly around the hood of his sweatshirt and was only listening with half an ear to all the yelled threats and curses being thrown at him. He'd grown used to it enough to drown it out.

From the way Bruce's eyes were flickering, he clearly hadn't.

Normally, Tim wouldn't press it.

Usually, he had enough patience, enough sympathy to cut Bruce some slack by not bringing every fucking thing to him.

Not this time.

Tim shook Damian like he was a spitting cat, dangling him by the scruff.

“Control your *fucking* kid-”

Bruce’s eyes suddenly sharpened with clarity, snapping to attention towards Tim. *Finally*.

“Hey!” Bruce began, rising slightly out of his seat. The batcomputer made the shadows on his face hang longer and darker. “Watch the language!”

Tim stopped. His free hand clenched at his side, shaking.

His *language*?

*That’s* what Bruce was worried about? Tim’s language? His *potty mouth*?

Was he selectively deaf or did he just not hear that laundry list of words that Damian had certainly not learned from *him*?

Bruce let out a bone-deep sigh, two fingers coming up to massage the bridge of his nose. Tim watched the wrinkles of his forehead furrow deep in exhaustion. There was a slump to his shoulders like Tim’s presence was draining. Like the situation of Damian digging sharp nails into the back of Tim’s hand was draining and exhausting and too much of a hassle to put up with.

Tim felt something inside him pull tight.

“Do *something* .” He repeated slowly, calmly. Damian’s thumbnail cut deeply into Tim’s wrist, likely trying to force him to open his hand and release his hold on him.

Bruce took a slow, steadying breath.

“Tim-.”

Tim felt his ears fill with static. It was like a white noise machine was set up behind his head. He could see Bruce’s mouth moving, saying his name and speaking at the same speed he always did with his lectures.

He was lecturing Tim.

Again.

Reprimanding him. Scolding him. Punishing him.

Acting like this was Tim's fault.

Tim thought for a moment, had the time-slowness feeling where he tried to weigh in. Putting a scale in his mind and weighing it all against one another because if it was *always* his fault. If Dick always sided with Damian and sent Tim out of the room to cool off. If Alfred always tried to comfort him with snacks and reason with him to not take everything so personally.

If Bruce got annoyed, got frustrated, and tired with Tim any time he tried to bring up old arguments with Damian or demand justice.

If Tim was in the wrong all the time, did that mean they thought Damian was in the right? No matter what he did, what he said, it would be okay?

Damian thrust a sharp kick into Tim's shins. It stung with the same pain as running into a table too small to be seen and too sharp to avoid. The hit would leave a warm welt of pain, nothing an ice pack couldn't fix.

Sure Tim understood, a bit. Being told to cool off and just 'think' when he got sent to his room made it impossible to not understand the other side.

Damian was a kid. Damian wasn't raised like Tim, like Dick, or Bruce. Damian had a short temper. Damian had issues he was working through. Damian was making progress, he just needed to have some patience.

Damian. Damian. Damian. It was always about Damian.

Couldn't Tim have a bad day without getting his head bit off for it?

No. Tim couldn't get angry, couldn't yell or raise his voice.

Couldn't punch Damian back in the car or the hall or at dinner, he could only take it.

He couldn't spend time with just Dick or Bruce, or try to invite them out without having to invite Damian too.

Damian this, Damian that. Always Damian, *Damian*, *Damian*.

Tim stopped for a moment and tried to imagine it. What the next few years would look like.

Damian squirmed harder in his hands, a sharp jab was thrown at his face and Tim swiftly tilted his head back to avoid it. Bruce's tone didn't change.

Damian would grow older, bigger, *stronger*.

When Damian hit Tim it wouldn't just sting, it would bruise. When he cornered Tim he couldn't just shove him aside. Not if Damian grew to be as big and broad as Bruce. Heck, even Talia had a bit of height over Tim. That temper, those issues he was "working on", his... *hatred* for Tim.

It wouldn't go away. It would get worse. Harder to deal with. Harder to ignore.

*Harder to suck up.*

Maybe Dick and Bruce were right. Maybe Damian wouldn't kill him.

A hand clawed for Tim's face.

But were the two of them really so willing to pin Tim's life on a 'maybe'?

Tim looked up, letting his gaze wash over Bruce's form through his lashes. He could hear Damian say something else beside him but it sounded like his voice was underwater.

Bruce's attention shifted to Damian, his rant stopping in favor of listening to whatever it was Damian was saying.

He always did that.

*Listened.*

Never to Tim though.

Bruce was still in his robe, hair still wet from a shower. It was Saturday and Wayne Enterprises was closed for the weekend. So Bruce got to relax a bit more.

Not that Tim could say the same, he had to dial into a meeting with Dick's PR team in a few hours for an 'incident' at the museum opening last week (*of course* caused by Damian).

Picking up after them day and night. How much longer before they asked him to pick up after Damian as well?

Speaking to Damian's PR team, organizing his appearances, doing damage control because Damian would inevitably do something wrong. Of course he would, as if he could do anything other than purposefully make Tim's *life harder*.

Bruce had restarted talking, his fingers were interwoven and resting on his stomach as he spoke, watching Tim with dull blue eyes.

He looked bored.

Tim felt his fingers clench tighter into fists. One hand dug into the soft skin of his palm, the other into the thick fabric of Damian's hoodie. His calves tightened so rigidly, that he could feel a tremble in his muscles up to his thighs. His mouth pressed into a thin line, teeth pressed so tightly together he could almost hear the soft grind of them.

Bruce was still talking, shaking his head, and letting his shoulders slump with a sigh. Disappointment.

He paused.

Tim took a stuttering breath through his nose. This was the rest of his life, the rest of his life.

Damian could do anything and Tim's feelings didn't matter.

Damian was still screaming beside him.

Loud.

Whiny.

*Obnoxious.*

"Tim-" Bruce began.

This was the rest of his life. The rest of his life. *The rest of his life.*  
*Therestofhislife-*

"Either *he goes* or *I do* ."

The words slipped out without any thought. Tim almost froze at them, his brain spasming alongside his throat as he tried processing what



he'd just said. He took a moment to think and peruse through it. Yes.

Either *Damian* went or *he* did.

Meeting Bruce's eyes, Tim could see he'd finally stopped talking. His fingers had pulled away from being intertwined, his shoulders unfolded from their slump.

Bruce was sitting with a straight back against his chair. He didn't look shocked or surprised. But definitely stunned. Tim had been around him long enough and could spot the small line between his brow. The softened shadow of his bottom lip. The lightened crease of his crow's feet.

Tim met his gaze placidly.

"I'm done."

He was. Tim was tired. He wanted to eat without worrying it'd be poisoned. He wanted to sleep without having to set up traps in his room. Wanted to relax without constantly having to look out for a small figure lurking about.

Tim was tired and done.

He didn't deserve this.

"Either Damian goes or I do, take your pick."

Bruce stared at him.

Tim had hardly noticed it through the sound of the Jolly Chimp in his brain banging away in his ears, but Damian had also fallen silent.

Hah. Like father, like son.

Without the constant fighting against his hold, Tim let his grip on Damian loosen, letting all his tugging finally amount to something. Damian slid away from him almost unconsciously. Tim felt his smaller body steadily pull away.

Tim didn't look at him the entire time, he kept his attention focused on Bruce.

Bruce remained seated.

Tim thought the possibility of losing him would've at least constituted

a standing-up conversation.

He guessed not.

Bruce lay his hands against the arms of his lumbar support chair. The bats on the ceiling of the cave let out little chirps and squeaks. Tim always thought they sounded a bit like broken dog toys.

Bruce's mouth opened, a considering light entered his eyes and it swiftly closed again. Bruce didn't hesitate often.

Tim rarely wondered: if it came down to him or Damian, who would Bruce choose?

Tim rarely wondered because most of the time he already knew the answer. It wasn't a hidden final jeopardy. It was pretty obvious.

Between him and Damian, who would Bruce choose?

Bruce's eyes were still red and tired. Tim knew he'd been up late working on the Dufner Case. Tim was supposed to have helped him with it but got sidetracked when he got a break in one of his own files.

It looked like he'd been fine on his own though. Tim let his eyes drift to the subsystem web laid out on the batcomputer. Red virtual strings connecting dots, locations, and people.

*Between him and Damian, who would Bruce choose?*

Bruce shifted in his seat, hand sliding down from the armrest and to his lap. Bruce's eyes flickered from Tim to the space beside him. It lingered on Damian a bit longer, something soft tugged at the edges of Bruce's expression.

Not like when he looked at Tim.

Tim knew.

*Between him and Damian, who would Bruce choose?*

Tim already knew.

*Between him and Damian, who would Bruce choose?*

Tim *always* knew.

*Between him and Damian, who would Bruce choose?*

Tim turned on his heel, hands no longer clenched at his sides. His fingers were loosely gripping the bottom of his sweater from where it was tucked into his jeans.

Just because Tim always suspected, always *knew* . Didn't mean it didn't hurt less.

And it didn't mean that Tim wanted Bruce or Damian to look at his face when it settled for him.

“Right. I'm going to get my things.”

Part of Tim wondered if he would hear footsteps follow up after him. If Bruce would call up after him, say ‘*wait, Tim*’, ‘*stop, Tim*’, ‘*hold on, Tim*’.

He didn't.

Tim didn't slow down enough to hear if Bruce rose to his feet out of his chair, if he did anything other than watch Tim climb the stairs out of the batcave.

*Between him and Damian, who would Bruce choose?*

Not Tim.

## Chapter End Notes

i initially planned the first chapter to be longer but i guess that'll have to be the next chapter.

# Chapter 2

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In cash, Tim had a few thousand scattered through his room. They were emergency funds for Red Robin. Unlike Jason or Bruce, he couldn't always intimidate or scare someone into telling him what he wanted. So bribery became the secondary mode of getting information from snitches, crooked cops, and unreliable goons if they proved unintimidated.

In total, \$3,345 was what Tim recovered as he stuffed underwear and socks into an old duffle bag. \$2,000 were supposed to be paid to Marco and DeVon Langstrom for their tip that uncovered the organized theft ring that hit Greeno's Jewelry Store the week before. That left Tim with a liquid fund of \$1,345.

In Gotham that would only stretch so far if he knew where to put it.

Tim's salary from his CEO duties were set to automatically deposit his wages bimonthly into a bank account controlled by Bruce. Tim didn't even have access to any of the credit or debit cards to use those funds anyway. Alfred was always the one that bought Tim's things for him.

Tim was pretty sure that some accountant at WE was responsible for managing all of Tim's finances. If Tim wanted access he'd have to wait until the office opened for the week to get any sort of paperwork for it.

Tim stopped for a moment, eyes considering his half-filled duffle bag with his clothes and the backpack with his laptop. Tim's large luggage and suitcases were stored away in some closet only Alfred knew about, so space was limited. He had to make do with what he had.

When Tim said he was going to get his things he'd really only meant his essentials. The furniture and bed were Bruce's. The coathangers, mirrors, and armoire belonged to the manor.

Tim really only owned a few of the contents. But he could buy new bedsheets, new posters, new colognes, and lotions. He hadn't used his skateboard in years so what was the point in bringing it? Same with his roller skates and old tennis racket.

Tim was never even good at tennis. He'd only wanted to join the team when he was in school because Bruce hadn't wanted him to.

He had spare suits in the penthouse of WE, if he got in early he could-  
Tim's thought broke off.

Was he still allowed to work at WE?

Tim tightened a finger in the loop of his jeans. He got that job through Bruce, *because* of Bruce.

It seemed to be generally understood that Robins that left the nest tended to be on their own. Dick took odd jobs to pay for his food and rent. Jason made his money through various criminal enterprise activities and businesses that Tim never took too close of a look at.

The stack of twenties sitting heavy in his wallet suddenly felt a lot lighter.

It was fine.

Tim could get a different job. A better one. One where he didn't demean himself in front of a room of old, rich, white narcissists that thought they delivered the word of god. Plus his dad still owned a few apartments throughout the city. A quick check-in with his old family accountant and Tim could see which ones hadn't been sold when the company had gone bankrupt and been liquidated. His mom probably had a few apartments in her name too that had gone untouched.

Tim might be able to weasel an address and spare key from her old lawyer when Monday finally arrived.

For the moment, Tim slung his duffle bag over his shoulder and grasped his backpack by the handle in the other, he needed to find a place for the night.

The nest was out, that was strictly for Red Robin business and Tim never felt quite comfortable dragging all his personal issues into a place dedicated to his vigilantism. Plus it was easily accessed by Batman and Robin. It was one of the reasons Tim had never seen the point in running away before.

Tim startled to a stop just as he reached the stairs.

Was that what he was doing? Running away?

Tim took a slow, steady breath before continuing his descent.

Running away. Hah. Tim had tried *that* once. The night after he'd gotten grounded for breaking one of the plates from his mom's wedding china, he'd stuffed a backpack full of cookies and a stuffy before he made a break for the door.

His chubby five-year-old legs hadn't even made it out of the driveway before he was running back, bawling, into the arms of his nanny.

Tim's socked feet landed with a soft 'thump' at the end of the staircase. His sneakers were stacked on the rack of the closet entrance. The rest of them, dress shoes, slippers, boots, were all left abandoned in the closet of his room. It didn't matter anyway, Tim only had one pair of feet to use.

Tim had been a sensitive child, according to his mom. Always so easily prone to tears and shaky like a frightened rabbit at a raised voice. Apparently, his dad had been wracked with guilt the first time he'd spanked Tim.

Tim crept past the door of the kitchen, hearing the sounds of Alfred moving around pans and chopping something on the cutting board. Dinner was supposed to have been soon.

Chicken and dumplings. The rest of the family weren't fans but it was one of Tim's favorites.

Well, that was pretty much confirmation of Alfred having overheard his and Damian's latest argument before Tim had dragged the younger boy down to Bruce.

Tim was finishing up his laces just as the smell of garlic being fried in butter met his nose.

For a moment, Tim hesitated. Fingers lingered on the loops, the ends of his too-long laces getting tucked into his shoes.

Alfred would be disappointed if Tim didn't come to dinner. That happened sometimes. An argument or disagreement with someone and Tim would stay up in his room and skip dinner. Alfred would always carry a plate to Tim's door with a sharp knock on the wood and a call of his name.

While the rest of the family would be down laughing and chatting, Tim would be up in his room, sipping soup and spearing potatoes with

his fork at his computer desk.

The smell of sizzling garlic and frying onion had the empty, hungry pit of Tim's stomach almost growling.

For a second, for a brief moment, Tim almost dropped his bags. Almost left his duffle bag at the door with his backpack on top. Nearly toed off his shoes and wandered into the kitchen and sat at the island to watch Alfred cook and soak in his presence. Maybe it would give him clarity, a chance to *think*.

Then Tim thought of the little face with angry green eyes scrunched in anger and annoyance. A sneer curled at Tim like he had any right to pass judgment on him.

*'Stupid'*

*'Worthless'*

*'Waste of space'*

*'Father should just get rid of you'*

If Tim stayed and sat at the table Damian would just kick at his shins like he did every night. The hard toe of his shoe would leave large welts that purpled into bruises. Tim always tried to keep his ankles crossed and tucked as far back under his chair as he could. But then that would mean Damian would go for his knees. His shoes would scuff and fray the fabric of his jeans enough that Alfred would chastise Tim about being more careful. Like Tim rolled around on the carpet all day to cause the fraying.

Tim was throwing the straps of his backpack over both shoulders before he knew it, his free hand was grasping the handle of his duffle.

There was some shuffling in the kitchen, the sound of Alfred's voice wafting alongside the smell of gently simmered carrots and potatoes.

Tim's hand was on the doorknob and pushing himself out the door before he could hear anymore.

The cold of winter in Gotham was crisp and Tim hadn't remembered to pack a heavier jacket.

Dick had only driven to the manor because he hadn't wanted to wash the pots and pans piled in the sink to make dinner. Plus whatever

Alfred had cooked up was sure to be better than having microwaved rice and chicken for the fourth night in a row.

He hadn't expected to run into the tail end of an argument.

Dick paused in the doorway, fist paused to knock on the wooden frame of the kitchen.

Alfred was whipping something in a mixing bowl with a spatula, wrinkled hand clenched tight around it as his wrist flicked into a little circle.

Bruce was leaned against the counter, face twitched the slightest bit, forehead creased, and palms clenched against the counter.

Dick let his hand slide down from where it was pressed to the doorway.

"Uh, hey?"

Two sets of eyes flickered over to him and Dick almost tensed at the hard, hidden emotion of Alfred's grey eyes piercing him. Dick watched as aged shoulders forcibly relaxed, as a mouth twitched in a small smile.

"Ah, Master Dick, I see you've come to join us for dinner."

Dick stared. He was slightly unnerved at the stare Alfred was leveling at him, his eyes not leaving him as his hands continued to work dough into a rough ball.

"Y-yeah? I was," Dick stepped further into the kitchen, shooting a slight look at Bruce whose eyes were now firmly locked onto the counter. "I figured I'd stop by for a bite, I was..."

Alfred was still smiling at him with that polite, 'guests are here' look that he gave to all visitors to the manor. Dick felt a bit hurt at the look.

"I mean, I guess I..." Dick trailed off again, watching as Alfred formed little balls of dough with his fists and delicately dropped them into a boiling pot of chicken soup.

Ah, chicken and dumplings. Dick repressed a grimace. Tim's favorite. Alfred always made their favorites whenever they were feeling down.

A quick glance around and Dick noted the absence of the smaller boy.



Usually, Tim would be hovering over Alfred's shoulder, nudging for a spoonful of broth or piece of chicken like an untrained puppy.

Dick moved his gaze back to the two of them, still standing silently by the kitchen island.

Bruce's fists were gripped tightly against the edge of the counter, the knuckles of his hands white from the force.

Dick frowned.

"Uh...Is everything...alright?"

Bruce and Alfred didn't usually beat around the bush when it came to bad news or drama. But the silence of the kitchen and Alfred's silent but tense demeanor clearly indicated they weren't going to say anything unless Dick asked first.

Bruce seemed to tense even further at his words and Alfred's hands froze where they were clenched around a little ball of dough.

The lines around Alfred's eyes were pulled tight, Dick watched the lines of his mouth turn thin as his lips pursed together in a tight expression.

"No."

Dick watched Alfred lower his hands down to the counter, his wrists resting against the bowl.

"No, I do not believe everything is '*alright*' ."

Dick squirmed in place. He could hear the air quotes and for some reason it made him feel scolded like he'd said or done something wrong.

Alfred continued without prompting.

"Master Timothy has packed a bag and left, your father allowed him to do so."

Alfred raised his chin in silent indignance, eyes half-lidded in unvoiced disapproval before lowering his gaze back to his bowl and continuing to form dough balls.

Bruce's shoulders raised, chin lowering and head tilted down.

“What.”

Dick felt his feet carry him forward, palms spaying against the island to lean in closer to Bruce and Alfred.

“I’m sorry, *what* ?”

“The young boy has emptied his sock and underwear drawer and removed several personal possessions including his toothbrush, comb, and several sets of clothing.”

Dick stared at Alfred. The ball of Alfred’s throat bobbed as he swallowed, hands continuing to work like a machine.

Dick turned his gaze back to Bruce, something hot shooting through him at the sight of him leaned up against the counter.

“*You kicked Tim out?* ”

There was something picking at Dick, like a hangnail, an annoying little tug at the back of his mind. He and Bruce hadn’t fought about it in years. Neither of them even really brought it up anymore. He’d carried the resentment of being fired as Robin and forced out of his childhood ( ‘ *I didn’t force you out, you left* ’ ) home for a long time before forgiving Bruce.

But back then, back when they’d been at each other like cats and dogs, back when Bruce hadn’t been Bruce but just Batman. Dick felt the simmer of that old hatred sizzle in his stomach.

Bruce’s eyes flickered up at him, the grey cast of his face and heavy bags from overworking framing his expression.

Something about it ticked Dick off. It checked off some little box for criteria he’d had in the back of his head and Dick...Dick understood now why Alfred wasn’t happy.

“Are you insane?!” Dick burst out, pushing his stomach into the edge of the counter to push his face in closer to Bruce’s. “Tim is sixteen! What’d he ever do to make you think this was-”

Bruce suddenly straightened up, a tightening of his shoulders pushing them back and making him look broader.

“*I did not* kick him out!”

“Pardon me, Master Bruce,” Alfred cut in, frown and glare hitting

Bruce alongside the harsh interruption. “but at this point, I hardly think it makes a difference.”

Bruce’s jaw tightened.

“*Alfred*,” Bruce’s voice had the tone of something that sounded like a plea, “you weren’t there, Tim he-” he cut off.

Bruce bit down on his lower lip, a hand coming up to rub at his forehead in agitation.

“He, he was upset *I knew that* but it, it all happened so quickly I...I didn’t process what was going on- I was just so *tired* from the Dufner case and then Tim came down about him and Damian fighting again and *and*.”

Bruce clenched his eyes closed, forehead scrunching up from the force as a chest-deep sigh pushed out of his mouth.

“I...I just wasn’t listening.” Bruce tilted his head down and Dick watched as he rubbed a hand along the back of his neck, working out a crick. “It’s just that the two of them are *always* fighting I-” Bruce paused, a flash of shame crossing his expression. “...I didn’t think it was...that *serious*.”

Alfred’s expression was unfazed.

“Master Bruce, how many times throughout yesterday did I advise you to take a break from your case?”

Bruce let a small grimace tug at his mouth.

“Your poor decision making and refusal to listen is not a justification-”

“I’m not trying to justify it!” Bruce cut in, mouth twisted into a frown. Dick leveled a glare at Bruce.

Being angry and strung out is one thing, but if he talked to Alfred in that tone again-

“I’m asking you to put yourself in *my* shoes-” Bruce continued, brow creased in what looked like discomfort. “What would *you* have done if your child told you to choose between them and another one of your children.”

Alfred’s stony expression faltered, a twitch of his mouth tugging at the downturn of his lips.

Dick watched the tight line of Alfred's shoulders slump slightly.

"Master Bruce..." Alfred trailed off.

Dick felt the wad in his throat loosen slightly at the sight of Alfred's exhausted shoulders.

"Where's Tim now?" He probed, hip digging into the counter with force.

Neither Bruce nor Alfred answered.

Dick felt his hand splayed out on the island curl into a slow fist. He turned his head to focus his gaze on Bruce who still wasn't meeting his eye.

Dick could fix this, Dick could fix a lot of things. Bruce making an ass of himself and pissing off one of Dick's brothers? Yeah, been there, done that. There was solidarity, a uniting force in knowing how much of a jackass Bruce could be. Tim understood that, he understood that Dick understood that too. But the pride and ego of a teenager was a whole ball game in and of itself.

And Tim had always been the most stubborn of the litter.

Stubborn but not stupid. Dick could reason with him, and have a 'come to jesus' moment before both Bruce and Tim went through their 'Batman-Robin rough patch'. The last time a Robin had left the nest, it had taken years before he returned.

Dick wasn't about to lose out on years of his brother's life just because Bruce decided he wanted to fumble and fuck up again.

So Dick just needed to know-

"Where's Tim?" He repeated.

Bruce kept his gaze locked on the counter. Dick felt the sharp edge of his nails begin to press into his palm.

"You know where he went, right?"

Dick could fix this, *he could fix this*.

Alfred cleared his throat lightly from across the island.

"Master Tim left behind his phone and equipment with trackers."

Dick stared at Bruce.

Bruce's jaw tightened minutely, a motion that had Dick rounding the corner of the island to huddle up against him.

"You don't know where he is?"

Bruce's gaze finally pulled away from the counter, his dull blue eyes meeting Dick's narrowed stare.

"No."

"You're telling me," Dick began, "that *you* don't have trackers sewn into his fucking underwear? Shoes, pants, *nothing*?"

"*You* ." Bruce tensely replied and Dick could see that he was equally as angry about Dick's rightfully said words, "were the one who lectured me about boundaries-"

"That was *before* you managed to drive away another one of your kids!" The minute those words left Dick's mouth he instantly knew he shouldn't have said them.

Bruce's eyes flashed something. It was gone in an instant but Dick could see the tightly repressed flinch of Bruce's shoulders and the undeniable hurt twitch of his brows.

Dick felt his shoulders lower from they were hiked up, a hand raising to smooth the lines of his brows-

"Bruce-"

"Father?"

Dick let his head turn back towards his previously vacated doorway. Damian tensely stood half in and out of the kitchen. Dick could see where his hands were shoved into the front pocket of his hoodie, his socked feet shifted uneasily on the linoleum of the floor when met by three pairs of eyes.

Dick watched Damian's eyes flicker between the three of them, lingering the longest on where Bruce was hunched over against the island counter.

"Is dinner almost ready?" Damian asked lowly, and if Dick didn't know any better, he'd say *hesitantly*.

“Damian.” Bruce pushed himself slightly up. “I thought I told you to stay in your room.”

Damian’s mouth opened and closed, forehead pulled tightly like he wanted to say something before deciding against it.

Dick watched the young Robin’s jaw twitch in a remarkably similar way to Bruce before he opened his mouth again.

“I was hungry.”

Bruce sighed, eyes slipping closed and missing the small flinch that trembled through Damian’s body at the action. Dick shot a glare back at Bruce that went unseen.

“Damian-”

“You said I could come down to the kitchens to eat if I was ever hungry,” Damian interjected, small mouth turned down as he shifted his hands inside his pocket uncomfortably. “I am hungry now.”

Bruce let out a long breath through his nose.

Damian hunched down deeper into the neck of his hoodie, mouth curling deep into a frown.

“Dinner will be served soon, Master Damian.” Alfred, *thankfully*, cut in. “I was just about to set out the silverware.”

Damian nodded slowly before his eyes flickered over to Dick.

“Will you be joining us this evening as well Grayson?”

Dick forced a smile that felt painfully fake onto his face.

“Yeah Dami! I’m staying for dinner!”

Damian nodded again, a small ‘oh’ of approval leaving him as he backed out of the doorway, shoulder half turned to leave before stopping.

“Will,” Damian paused and Dick could see the instant his shoulders went from a forced relaxed state to tense. “Will Drake be joining us?”

Alfred paused from where he was pulling out cleanly pressed cloth napkins from one of the kitchen drawers.

Bruce pressed the end of his palm into the ridge of his brow bone. Dick watched Bruce's mouth twitch open and interjected before he could speak.

"Maybe!" Dick brightly offered, feeling the edges of his cheeks begin to ache from the tightly forced expression. "I'm gonna go ask, okay? You know that Timmy likes to eat in his room sometimes, always so busy with something, haha!"

Damian's feet shifted against the hardwood of the hallway, sock-covered toes squirming as he moved foot to foot.

"Drake's room is empty."

Dick felt his smile twitch. Damian has half turned away, his face turned in favor of the hallway and pointedly out of sight of all their gazes.

Bruce let out a deep sigh, the scrape of a barstool following as he pushed himself to his feet.

"Damian, I've told you numerous times to *stop* going into your brother's room."

Damian's head twitched back to face them and Dick could see how his expression was creased, eyes lowered as he argued back.

"The door was open!"

"That's not an invitation, Damian!" Bruce boomed, palm falling and slapping on the counter with a loud sound.

Damian flinched a full-body twitch that had him backing up a few steps. Dick instantly rounded on Bruce, Alfred as well, both of them leveling harsh gazes.

Dick could see the instant regret that flooded Bruce's expression, the tight curl of his brow, and the turn of his lips immediately lightening. He lifted his palm from the table and tucked it against his stomach, fingers curled slightly into the fabric of the half undone robe.

"Damian I'm-"

Damian refused to meet his gaze, green eyes locked firmly on the kitchen tile in front of him.

"I'm...I didn't mean to raise my voice." Bruce said quietly.

Damian nodded tensely, feet backing slowly into the hallways like Bruce might up and attack him unprovoked again.

Dick could see the flash of pain in Bruce's expression when he caught on to it as well.

"I understand, Father." Damian quietly replied. Dick was almost half out of his seat to go to him before Damian turned in the direction of the dining room. "I will be waiting in the dining room."

Dick watched his smaller figure, dwarfed by a hoodie a few sizes too big, turn down and disappear down the hallway alongside his quiet steps.

Dick felt his back teeth press together, jaw tight as he forced himself to take steady breaths.

"I see that you're going 2/2 with your kids today."

"Dick, *not now* ."

Dick turned on his heels, glower faltering at the pained expression on Bruce's face.

*'I fucked up, I know I fucked up, don't remind me (help me fix it, Dick. Please)'*

Dick felt the fight leave his shoulders, hands busying themselves with the end of his denim jacket. He took a minute, just a moment, to swallow back that familiar frustration with Bruce. The annoyance, the pain at having to be the one to pick up after him- it got tiring sometimes. The fixing and mending, the soothing and mediating. Dick just got so *tired* of it sometimes. It wasn't fair of him to ask Bruce to not drop the ball. Bruce tried his best, and did the most that he could- Dick *knew* that. He just wished that *he* wasn't the one that always had to fix it.

And he could. He could fix this. He could fix this.

*He didn't know what he would do if he couldn't.*

Dick pushed himself up and away from the counter, from Bruce. He pulled at the ends of his jacket, straightening it and pushing the metal buttons through their holes.

"Go in there," Dick pointed a finger in the direction of the dining



room. “Apologize, *properly* .”

Dick straightened the sherpa-lined collar to protect his exposed neck from the cold.

“I’m going to look for Tim, bring him back, and then *you* -” Dick pointed a hard finger at Bruce’s face, “-are going to apologize to *him* .”

Dick turned on his heel and in the direction of the entrance, hands already fumbling for his car keys.

He could fix this. He could. He could.

It took a few hours of driving around Gotham before Dick managed to track Tim down to a dumpy motel.

It was a far cry from anything Dick would’ve expected for the younger boy to go, but then again that was sort of the point, wasn’t it? Dick climbed the steps of the crumbled concrete staircase with exposed, rusty rebar with careful footing.

It had been uncomfortably easy to get the number of the room Tim was staying in. Dick had only needed to flash a crisp fifty and the middle-aged woman manning the counter had barely been able to hold herself back from spilling.

Gotham’s downtown wasn’t safe on a good day and the motel Tim had chosen was only a few blocks out from crime alley.

That was Red Hood territory. Close, not too close. Enough in the vicinity to receive the protection of a vigilante, far enough away to not be on their radar.

It was exactly the type of reasoning a strategic mind like Tim’s would work out. Dick felt the familiar curl of pride at the younger vigilante. Tim wasn’t much of a bragger, unlike other capes, he liked to do his job and then quietly retreat home.

Dick was the bragger, the one who showed off and liked to do so. He was pretty sure that he bragged enough for both of them, making sure anyone who would listen knew how much of a clever little egghead his baby brother was.

But that hadn’t happened in a while had it? Dick paused as he was about to knock on the rotten wood door of Tim’s motel room.

When was the last time Dick had tried bringing Tim up in conversation? Hadn't he stopped because...because everyone started to look uncomfortable at the mention of him?

Nobody really liked to talk about when heroes went off the deep end. No one mentioned when it happened to Booster Gold after Blue Beetle's death, or Barbara during the in-between period after the Joker got to her and before Oracle emerged.

Heroes didn't like to talk about things like that. Dick always thought it was pretty hypocritical of the community.

But then again, he would know, wouldn't he?

The sound of a door chain being unlocked cut into Dick's bitter musings with a sharp interruption. The door to Tim's motel opened a sliver before the long strands of Tim's bangs slotted into the small space, framing his face. Dick could see where his cheeks, red from the cold, squished up against the doorframe and the door.

His blue eyes narrowed at Dick with suspicion, brows raised the slightest bit in question.

Dick felt the forced grin on his face falter at the expression.

He could fix this. He could fix this.

"Tim! I've been looking all over for you!"

Tim's lips pursed the slightest bit, his head tilting and letting his forehead rest against the doorframe. Dick hesitated a bit, the probing look in Tim's eyes, flickering over his form like he was scanning him as some sort of...threat.

"Did..." Tim paused, mouth curling down in consideration. "Did *Bruce* send you?"

Dick thought of Bruce, agitated and clearly not in a good state leaning against the kitchen island, snapping at Damian. That was not a Bruce that could offer anything good if Dick had allowed him to come along like he'd requested halfway into Dick's one-man hunt.

Yeah, those texts for him to give Bruce the reins were still sitting heavy in his pocket.

Tim's lips were chapped from the cold, his tongue darting out to

moisten them as Dick shifted on his feet.

When he and Bruce fought, the last thing Dick had wanted to know was the whereabouts and feelings of his mentor.

But this was Tim and Tim had always been a hard kid to get a read on.

“It’s almost dinner!” Dick brightly offered. “Alfred’s making chicken and dumplings!”

Tim grimaced, nose curling a bit before smoothing out.

“I already had dinner.”

Dick felt his smile waver. The corners of Tim’s mouth were stained brown and he could see the fingers of his right hand, grasping the door, were orange. Dick had passed the vending machine outside of the concierge’s office, stuffed full with sodas, energy drinks, chocolate bars, and chips.

“But it’s Alfred’s food!” Dick half argued, “plus it’s cold out, your cheeks are red!”

Tim half ducked behind the door at that and Dick had to make do with the pair of blue eyes still peeking out at him.

“I *said* I already had dinner,” Tim stressed, gaze narrowing even further at Dick, “now leave me alone.”

Dick stepped in closer, feet scuffing on the ‘Welcome!’ doormat.

“Tim, please,” Dick pleaded, resting a palm on the door and lightly pushing on it. Tim’s eyes immediately frowned at him and pushed back, nearly closing the door on him if Dick hadn’t shoved his foot into the doorway.

Tim shoved the door harder against Dick’s foot.

“Move!”

“No.” Dick frowned down at Tim, fingers grasping at the door to ease it open more. “Tim, you can’t stay here.”

“Says who?”

“Says *me*,” Dick grunted at the shot of pain of his bones getting packed

together. “This isn’t a safe place for you to stay, do you know how easy it was for me to get the woman in front to give me your room number?”

“Well so long as she didn’t give you a *key*, I don’t care.”

Dick packed that idea away for another time.

“Tim,” Dick stressed, “I know Bruce messed up but if you come home we can sit down, the three of us.”

Tim stopped pushing on the door for a moment, enough for Dick to breathe a slight sigh of relief.

“*Three?*” Tim asked from behind the door, his voice slightly muffled from behind the wood.

Dick nodded before remembering that Tim wasn’t able to see him through the small sliver.

“Yes, we can work this out and...” Dick paused, “and Bruce will apologize for making you upset.”

He *would*, Dick would make sure of *that*.

Dick could see where Tim’s orange fingers began to curl around the door, polished nails digging softly into the chipped paint of splintering wood.

“...Will Damian be there?”

Dick frowned, hands still pressed lightly against the doorway.

“What?”

“I *asked*,” Tim said slowly, “if *Damian* was going to be there.”

“Tim...” Dick started, “this isn’t about you and Damian, Bruce was-”

“Oh, how *fucking* typical.”

Dick jumped at the thick tone of Tim’s voice, leg jolting as the door slammed against his cuneiform bone. Dick winced, flying to rest on his knee while the other tried to push the door open to give him some room.

“Of course, you’re here to defend him, *again*.”

“Tim-”

“You think this is about Bruce?” Tim asked, “This is about *you* too.”

“ *Tim* -”

“I told Bruce down in the cave already, it’s *him* -” Tim pulled the door open, enough for Dick to be able to yank his foot out of the way. Tim’s cheeks still glowed a hot red, but this time his eyes were narrowed, gaze locked intensely on Dick’s form. “-Or *me* .”

Dick felt something cold wash over him and settle in his stomach.

He could fix this. He could fix this.

“If Damian is staying *there* -” Tim pointed out in some direction and Dick was sure that if he checked a map it would be in the direction of the manor, “then I’m staying *here* .”

Tim’s feet were firmly locked into place. The door was open enough for Dick to glance into the room. He could see where Tim’s laptop and charger were set up on the little desk by a window. The bed was messy with clothes spilling out of a duffle bag.

Dick suddenly recalled his two-day trek across the state to New York when he and Bruce had that huge falling out years ago. He recalled staying in the shitty motels and 24-hour bus station terminals until he made it back to the Titan’s then-headquarters.

Tim’s Titans were in outer space on a mission, Dick knew that. Raven had let him know a few days before they’d departed. That was almost a week ago.

“I asked you, nicely, to leave me alone-”

Dick swallowed at the pursed lips of Tim’s mouth, his eyes bitter and downcast.

“But I guess I don’t get to have space do I?”

“Tim-” Dick began, something like distress twinging in his chest.

“You said we could *talk*,” Tim continued, voice tinged to be slightly mocking. Tim’s eyes flickered up from the floor back to Dick. “I *tried* to talk, I *wanted* to talk. *He* didn’t want to listen.”

“ *I’ll* listen!” Dick insisted, face creased with distress. “I’m here Tim, *I*

can listen.”

Tim immediately shook his head, bangs swaying from the force.

“No, I don’t want to talk to you.” Tim rebuffed him, brows furrowed against his forehead. “You don’t listen either. I know. I’ve tried.”

He could fix this. He could fix this.

“*I tried, I talked,*” Tim repeated, chapped lips pressing into a thin line, ends getting pulled further down into a frown as the bridge of his nose crinkled. “Now I’m done trying and I’m done talking.”

“Tim,” Dick pleaded. “Just...you can’t cut the conversation to this- I just...”

He could fix this. He could fix this.

“Where is Damian supposed to go?”

Tim’s lips pulled harder into a frown.

“He’s...He’s a *kid*, Tim.” Dick frowned. “It’s not fair to ask that, you know it.”

Tim bit into his bottom lip, teeth rolling the flesh hard enough to turn it red from agitation.

“You’re right.” Tim tightened his grip on the door’s edges. “It’s not fair.”

Dick nodded.

“He’s a kid.”

Dick sniffled, the bite of the cold-shooting a sharp pain into his sinuses.

Tim teetered against the door, his jeans scraping against the brown carpet of his motel room.

“He’s a kid,” Tim repeated slowly, and Dick was just about to open his mouth and-

“So what am I?”

Dick’s mouth clicked closed.

“What am I, Dick?” Tim asked, mouth turned sour, eyes sharp as he glared up at Tim from behind his bangs. “His punching bag? His whipping boy? Is that it?”

“N-No, Tim of course not-” Dick started, taken aback by the fierce cut of Tim’s eyes.

“Could’ve fooled me then.”

Dick felt his jaw clench closed, the sharp bite of a hard wind blowing up from the parking lot sending shivers down his spine. Tim remained unmoved in the doorway.

“Damian,” Tim began, eyes hard, “has been getting a pass from *you*, from *Bruce*, from *Alfred* - this entire time. But he’s *not* going to get one from *me*.”

Dick frowned, brow furrowed together as he huddled further into his jacket.

“Tim, he’s been *trying* -”

“I don’t care.” Tim shook his head. “I don’t care. He can try all he wants but *I’m. Staying. Here.*”

Dick wants to argue, it’s on the tip of his tongue. Damian was harsh, brittle sometimes too. The kid had his sharp edges and Dick knew what it was like being on the receiving end of his vitriol but Dick could only imagine what it was like being so small and so unable to do much of anything. Dick was sure if he or anyone were in Damian’s shoes they might be angry too.

If Tim could just...if he could just try a little harder-

“*Don’t ask me to give him another chance.*” Tim immediately shot down before Dick got a chance to say anything. “I swear Dick, *don’t* ask me to give him another chance.”

Dick froze. There was an edge of a plea in Tim’s voice, his words tinged with a cut of something that had Dick focusing on the depressed edge of Tim’s mouth, his shifty eyes curled with the slightest bit of wetness.

Dick was upsetting him. (*He could fix this. He could fix this*)

“Tim...”

He could fix this. He could fix this

Tim avoided his eyes, tucking his forehead against the door.

“Just go, Dick. Please. *Just go away* .”

Dick heard the tremble in Tim’s voice.

Dick turned. Dick walked away.

*He could fix this. He could fix this*

Dick walked down the crumbling concrete steps with careful feet.

*He could fix this. He could fix this.*

He cut across the parking lot, tucking his hands into his denim jacket’s pockets to protect them from the hard cold of Gotham in the winter.

*He could fix this. He could fix this.*

Dick could see his breath in front of his face as he let out a shaky sigh, his hand curled around the car keys in his pocket, legs carrying him across the street to the meter he was parked at.

*He could fix this. He could fix this*

*He could fix this. He could fix this*

He didn’t fix this. He didn’t fix this.

Tim didn’t want to listen to Dick. Tim didn’t want to talk to Dick. Tim didn’t want to...see Dick.

Dick pressed a clenched hand against the cold glass of the driver’s side door.

His little brother would take a cold, drafty motel over his own home.  
Would take candy bars and chips over a hot home-cooked meal.  
Would sleep in a room that could be broken into by strangers looking to hurt him over his own bed.

Dick pressed a shaky breath against the window of his car. His breath fogged up the glass, letting Dick feel the cold condensation against his mouth as he fumbled for his key to unlock the door.



He didn't fix this. He didn't fix this.

*He didn't fix this. He didn't fix this.*

Dick felt a creeping sensation racing up the back of his head and ducked without a second thought. A plastic-wrapped loaf of Wonder Bread harmlessly bounced off the driver-side window of his car.

Dick tilted his head back, shoulders tensed and hands clenched into a fist-

“Ugh, shame.”

Dick felt his creeping dread drain away before immediately surging back up at the leather jacket-sweater ensemble figure making their way across the street. Dick could hear Jason's thick-soled winter boots sloshing through the road slush snow to reach him.

Dick watched as Jason bent down and polished off the lightly soaked loaf of bread on his sweater before stuffing it down into the white plastic bag of groceries he was holding in his other hand.

Dick felt his shoulders tighten further as the slightly towering figure of the Red Hood, stared down at him with a mouth upturned in vague amusement. Dick had seen him make that same face at a pair of rats fighting over a sesame seed bagel once.

“Well, well, well what's Goldilocks doing in my little neck of the woods?” Jason's grin was wide and promised no good things as Dick tried to stabilize his footing on the icy road.

Jason didn't like him, but he liked Tim *even less*.

If Jason knew that Tim was-

Dick's eyes flickered over to the motel he'd just left before he could stop himself.

Jason straightened at his mistake, head turning and eyeing the roadside motel with vague interest before Dick could stop him.

Dick could curse himself. It was the *mask*, he was too used to there being a mask to cover up for stupid mistakes like that.

Not only did Dick *not* fix it. He just made it *worse*.

Chapter End Notes

not completely happy with how this chapter turned out but at least i managed to get it and the plot progressing forward

## Chapter 3

Jason had been having a pretty alright day. He was still recuperating from being caught by surprise from a pipe to the gut. The ribs weren't broken, just a little sore. He was fine so long as he didn't bend down too hard or breathe wrong.

Something that was becoming steadily harder to do when his day went from good to *great*.

Jason could barely hold down the urge to laugh in the face of a white-faced Dick Grayson, eyes wide and panicked as Jason slowed to a stop in front of him.

His shoulders were raised, breath coming out fast and filling the space between them with white clouds. He looked like a little rabbit cornered by a fox.

Which made sense, he was essentially in Jason's territory and at his mercy. Who knew the bats felt safe enough to walk through his streets in the *daytime*.

Jason would have to do something about that.

Though it seemed like the *wonderful, mighty, unstoppable* Dick Grayson was doing enough scaring into compliance on his own. Dick's form unfroze, his eyes narrowed instead of the darted rabbit look Jason had spotted in them. A leg shifted behind him and Dick looked all the world like a tiger ready to pounce.

Jason had gotten that look a lot when he'd first moved into the manor.

"Jason, what are you doing here?"

"My fuckin' street," Jason offered, swinging his grocery bag around to point to all the apartment buildings and closed-down shops surrounding them. "What are *you* doing here?" Jason asked.

Dick startled, eyes drifting away for a moment before they snapped back to lock onto Jason.

Jason felt a smile widening into something larger when Dick huddled closer into his jacket. Something that looked like shame flashed across the older boy's face and Jason felt something that felt like giddiness. It

was a mirror image of the face those ‘oh so respectable’ finance guys would make when leaving a skeevy motel room.

Given the earlier glance at the one laying behind them, Jason was sure he could hazard a guess as to what had made the golden boy in front of him so twitchy.

Fuck it. Jason had time.

Dick’s mouth was firmly closed into a thin line anyway.

“Or maybe I could just skirt on over across the street and pay a visit to the little thing you got tucked away?” Jason pointed a thumb behind him, having all too much fun with the startled expression that swept across Dick’s face.

“N-No, wait!”

Jason began walking backward, sliding his heels slightly along the icy road to avoid tripping over the curb. Dick scrambled after him, looking all the world like a deer on ice skates. So much for all the grace and balance he was so proud of.

Jason’s snow boots allowed him to glide back on the ice without much worry while Dick’s little ankle boots hardly allowed him to have much grip with the desperation he was scrambling after Jason.

“Jason, wait!”

Jason started walking faster, his smile widening and feeling like a kid in a candy store as his grocery bag swung at his side.

“Jason, *please* !”

Dick ran into Jason’s back, immediately scrambling back like he might catch a disease. Jason felt his smile become strained for a second before it went away.

“Jason, Jason, *Jason* -” Dick’s voice was tinged with the edge of begging, his breath coming out in faster spurts as he glanced up at Jason with big eyes looking like was gonna cry in the middle of the street-

Jason slowed down, slightly.

“Look,” Dick began quickly, hands held in front of him like Jason was a raging bull that would charge at any moment, “I know you don’t like

me-”

“Understatement.” Jason cut in, unimpressed.

Dick’s face twitched, brows curling up in hurt before getting swiftly wiped away.

Jason didn’t get why the older boy always acted like Jason was some kind of *bully*, going around the playground and stealing toys.

Dick’s lip curled down for a second before wiping away as Dick began fumbling with words.

“I know you have no reason to listen to me-”

Well, Dickface was right on the money with that.

“-But please, I’m asking you to leave this alone, this doesn’t have anything to do with, with-”

Dick glanced around the empty street like anyone was going to overhear them.

“- *Bats*. Okay?”

Jason made a considering sound. A light hum like he was giving Dick’s words actual consideration. It was a complete act and Dick seemed to pick up on that.

“I know I can’t make you do anything-” He sighed.

“You never could,” Jason shrugged. Dick’s expression tightened.

Oooo, well here came that temper that always reared its head whenever Jason was around.

For a second Jason thought the other boy would get snappish like he always did as he huffed and puffed and pissed Jason off.

Instead, Dick took a slow breath, white cloud getting breathed out at a rate that implied he was counting mentally back from ten.

Jason watched as Dick attempted to collect himself, probably reigning back that instinct that told him to be an asshole at the first sign or mention of Jason Peter Todd.

Dick’s mouth pursed for a moment before his blue eyes gazed up at

Jason in forced calm.

“What do I need to do to make you let this go?”

Jason felt a weird giddiness flood his stomach. He felt like he should’ve been skipping down the street and jumping to click his heels together, throwing his hat up in celebration or something.

Instead, he was staring down at Dick Grayson whose unease was showing in the form of shifting their weight foot to foot and shivering at the bite of cold wind nipping his neck.

It was a nice feeling, having all the cards. Little Dickie was out in the cold and trying to negotiate with mean ol’ Jason in his territory.

It was so comical Jason could laugh.

“What do you say, Jason?” Dick asked, crossing his arms and sticking his palms under his armpits to try and retain warmth. His brows were furrowed up, mouth curled down like he disliked the fact that he had to lower his delicate sensibilities to Jason’s level.

Jason made a loud ‘hmm’ sound, raising a hand to cup his chin.

“I sayyyy,” Jason trailed off, dragging out the ‘y’. Dick shifted again and Jason felt his facade drop, a grin fully entering his face. “I say let’s go ask the friend you’ve got tucked up there.”

Dick’s eyes widened, fear filling his face for a moment as his eyes darted to the side in search of a specific door.

*Got it.*

Jason began merrily making his way through a patch of snow-covered bushes on the curb, kicking up a bit of gray ice slush as he turned into the parking lot of the motel.

Jason expected to hear scrambling, the found of expensive boots sliding through ice and water to chase after him. He didn’t.

A quick turn and he could see Dick pale-faced and breathing sharply at the edge of the broken concrete of the lot.

“Arent’cha coming to say *hi* with me?” Jason asked, the edge of a mocking tone in his voice. A fake pout curled at his lips as Dick remained firmly in place.

"Jason, please- I-I" Dick choked and that near teary look returned. "T-They don't want to see me. *So can you just-* "

"Guess that's a no, huh? For shame Dickie, keeping a lady waiting like that you outta be-"

"Will you cut it out!" Dick snapped, brows twitching down in anger. Jason blinked innocently.

"Just-" Dick choked out, "Can you just-"

Jason swung the grocery bag at his side in a wide arc, scuffing his shoes and looking like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

Dick's face creased like he was seconds away from begging.

A sight Jason wouldn't be opposed to seeing.

" *This doesn't even have anything to do with you-* "

"I beg to differ." Jason shrugged. "This-" Jason stretched his arms out, motioning towards the wide-open street. " *Is all mine*. If something's happening under my nose-"

Jason pointed at said sniffer.

" *I wanna know what it is.*"

"I-It's personal Jason," Dick stuttered, a wave of heat swept over Dick's expression. Normally, Jason would say it was embarrassment, but it didn't quite fit. More along the lines of...distress. Or maybe worry.

The way he was looking between Jason and a door on the second level.

So concern for the person inside, not a civilian then.

Dick was a fucking moron who didn't know anything about Jason, but he knew that the Red Hood didn't touch the ladies of the night.

So not that either.

If Dick were trying to hide some inappropriate hookup from Barbara, the nosy rosy, he would've been more irritated, not scared.

Jason made his distaste for the family pretty clear. A few members

*especially* in particular, so if Dickie was that bent out of shape about Jason heading up those set of crumbling stairs-.

Well, all the pieces were coming nicely together and Jason wasn't happy about it.

Jason was hardly the biggest fan of the third boy wonder and he was sure the feeling was mutual.

But in the face of a Dick on the verge of hyperventilating, well...Jason might make an exception to his presence.

Just this once.

With that Jason kept walking, something getting soothed in him at the strangled clucking behind him.

"Jason! Jason, stop *please* !"

Despite his amusement, Jason couldn't help the little trickle of discomfort at the plea present in Dick's voice.

"Calm down Dickie," Jason called back, inclining a hand back as he started climbing stairs two at a time, "I'm not gonna touch the kid, scout's honor!"

Dick seemed to be serious about the little imposter not wanting to see given that he didn't follow and fell silent behind him. Jason took that as permission to continue up the rest of the way before setting to a stop at the door closest to the stairs. Dick had been staring up in this direction and the rooms were relatively spaced away, making the door he was banging on the only one that could be the right one.

Tim had pulled the door open more than a crack, exhaustion from the long walk of the manor to Gotham, more than a little irritation at his wet, cold feet from stepping in a large puddle, and anger at...

Just anger. Frustration too and a bit of pain because Dick's presence hadn't helped. Not that it ever did lately.

Instead of the face of his elder brother, Tim looked up at the wide fox-grin of Jason Todd.

Any of Tim's protests or words immediately died on his tongue as he stared up at him.



Jason was in thick-soled boots lined with fur for the cold. A leather jacket kept him warm along with black knitted gloves and a green scarf wrapped around his neck. Tim immediately imagined it as the noose the older boy was going to string him up by.

Tim *had made* sure- he'd double-checked the map of Gotham when he ducked into the lobby of a snazzy hotel to get out of the cold for a minute. Jason's territory didn't start for a few more streets, the motel Tim was in wasn't well placed enough for any kind of criminal activities. Too far away from stadiums, stores, main roads, or public transportation.

Clearly, he hadn't done a good enough job of covering his tracks if both Dick and Jason had found him within the day of his departure.

Departure.

Tim felt his chest tighten at the thought, something filling his throat as he steadily grasped the edge of his motel door.

He hadn't brought his utility belt, a backup staff, no weapon- *nothing*.

Jason was built like a tank and Tim was in a thin sweater and wet sweatpants rolled up at the ankles.

Tim also didn't have a mask on.

Tim swallowed thickly as Jason took a single step in closer, filling the doorway.

Surely Jason had enough empathy or enough sense to realize that starting a fight in a place they would be remembered (the concierge had seen his face, *they'd seen his face*. )

Jason was laying a heavy gaze around his room, eyes lingering on Tim's opened duffle bag sitting on the bed.

"Well now this little bird's made himself right at home, hasn't he?"

"Jason."

Jason's green eyes flickered down to him. He couldn't see any of that cold anger or hard brutality usually directed at him.

Tim wasn't any less wary at the sight.

Jason's smile was wide and packed full of something that looked

brimming with satisfaction.

“Now what’s got Dickie all in a twist about you?”

Tim swallowed, eyes flickering behind Jason as if Dick might pop out of the corner.

*‘Just go, Dick. Please. Just go away.’*

Tim didn’t regret the words but he was definitely rethinking them and let them play on loop in his head.

Jason made a small noise of interest as he focused his eyes on a dark water stain spread across the ceiling.

“Geez, what a fucking dump,” Jason commented, glancing around. “Who’d you piss off to end up here?”

It was a joke, Tim could tell. Jason had that little airy lilt in his tone that said he was doing it in jest. Tim rarely heard it, but when he did, it was never directed at him.

Jason must’ve been in a good mood.

Tim glanced over the plastic bag of what looked like groceries swaying beside Jason. The ends of a bunch of green onions stuck out of the bag along with the edge of a tuna fish can that was pressed against the plastic.

Somehow it was hard for Tim to put together an image of Red Hood running down drug dealers with the image of Jason in line for check out at a grocery store.

Tim was so caught up in the image he didn’t register Jason’s eyes on him until he felt their weight. He tensed instantly, wet toes digging into the brown carpet, jaw tensed as he met Jason’s eyes that had lost a bit of the humor but were no less light.

“You know who’s territory you’re standing in right now, kid?”

It didn’t feel like a rhetorical question.

Tim didn’t want to say it was Jason’s because it wasn’t, *not technically*.

Tim doubted Jason would be very happy to hear that though. The pop in the mouth he’d get for saying it would probably be deserved for ‘acting smart’.

So Tim opted to stay silent instead.

*‘Tim.’ Bruce sighed. ‘Champ, I know it’s hard but if you can’t say anything nice to Damian, try just...not saying anything at all.’*

“What? You goin ‘all Beethoven on me?” Jason asked, brow raised.

Tim swallowed.

“He went deaf, not mute.”

Jason narrowed his eyes slightly.

“What?”

The tone wasn’t dangerous but Tim couldn’t help but feel like he was navigating a minefield.

“Beethoven.” Tim continued. “He went deaf, not mute.”

Jason stared at him for a second, expression nearly blank before a tiny curl of his lips filled in his face.

“Oh, so the baby’s got jokes?”

Tim shifted, wringing his hands in his sweater and hiding his shiver at the cold breath of wind getting pushed into his room.

“M not a baby.”

Jason’s grin widened to uncomfortable proportions and Tim couldn’t help but feel like he’d done something. Whether it was wrong or not he didn’t know, it was just the pressure of a feeling and Jason’s stare.

Jason gave him a considering lingering look, his green eyes shifting from Tim to his bed to the small wooden table pushed to the back of the room.

Jason’s eyes drifted back to him and seemed to narrow, considering something for a second before the pressing weight that had been filling the room lifted.

“Alright, listen, kid,” Jason began, tossing his grocery bag over his shoulder and Tim heard the light ‘ting’ of a few cans colliding together. “You caught me on a good day so I’ll cut you a break capeesh?”

Tim didn't say anything, probably because he didn't want to risk saying something about how Jason's words mimicked those cheesy Italian mobster movies Bruce liked to watch.

He also didn't want to say anything about what he thought about Jason thinking he was doing Tim some kind of *favor*.

He instead opted for a tense nod.

"*Atta boy* ." Jason's harsh hand came down on Tim's head, ruffling Tim's hair with no small degree of roughness. Tim let his head bobble back and forth from the motions, partly resigned and burying the lingering bits of indignance at the treatment.

He was in no position to raise objections about any kind of treatment.

Jason's fingers weaved into Tim's hair, tugging lightly, sending little shocks of discomfort down Tim's back from the pulling. It didn't hurt, not really. But Tim wasn't interested in finding out what it would feel like if Jason wanted that to change.

Even under some kind of facade of 'nice' Jason still walked on the side of being too rough.

"Dickface is down the parking lot in case you were wondering, was near shivering out of his boots when he saw me pull up."

Tim swallowed thickly.

Jason's dog-like petting came to a slow stop. He didn't pull his hand off Tim's head.

"You know," He began conversationally. "I don't like you."

Tim didn't say anything to that. Jason wasn't the first one to say that to Tim's face and he wouldn't be the last.

"But for the sake of putting Dickie's *panties in a twist*- " Jason said with barely contained glee. Tim wondered if he talked like that when bragging about handing Tim's ass to him. "-I'll make an exception."

Tim's throat felt full like he's been holding water in his mouth and the action was making it hard to breathe only through his nose with the threat of choking hanging over him.

"*But lemme be clear*, " Jason suddenly leaned in closer, a cold gust of wind sending shivers down Tim's spine as the older vigilante just

barely avoided touching their foreheads together. “I’ll only find this funny for so long- got it?”

Tim nodded stiffly

Don’t overstay the welcome.

Come Monday he needed to be *out* lest he incur the wrath of Jason who already knew where he was staying. He’d have had to change locations regardless given that information.

“So spill.”

Tim snapped to attention, eyes focusing on how Jason’s face was still pressed in close. His formerly unpleasant expression had shifted to a wide grin.

“What’d you do to end up here?” Jason’s smile was ecstatic, ears eager to hear all the details about Tim having committed some faux pas and subsequently turned out on his ass for it.

Tim’s spine went taut.

“Nothing.” He replied tensely.

Jason scoffed, the noise thick and grating and hurting Tim’s ears as he hunched his shoulders down lower.

“Right, like I’m gonna believe *that* .”

“*It’s the truth.*” Tim tried to keep his temper under check. It was the truth. He hadn’t done anything. *He hadn’t done a single thing.*

Why was everyone trying to punish him today? First Damian, then Bruce, then Dick. All Tim had wanted to do was *relax* for a few hours at home before having to dial into some stupid meeting he wanted nothing to do with.

Why was that so much to ask?

He was sitting in literally the grimmest motel room he’d ever been in. His shoes were soaked from gray ice water. He was cold with nowhere to go because *he hadn’t planned better*, and Jason wanted him to strip down in front of him like a frat pledge so *he could laugh at him*.

“What? Did you delete the batcomputer files?” Jason continued probing, smile amused at Tim’s misfortune.

Tim pressed his lips together.

“You fuck up a case? Plunge the old man into bankruptcy?”

“Jason.” Tim began, throat tense and jaw tight as he hid his shaking fists behind him. “*Stop.* ”

“No, wait!” Jason suddenly exclaimed, smiling like a snake and hell’s fires shining in elated eyes. “Let me guess- he found out you were gay!”

Tim knew that Jason protected all kinds of people on his streets. Including the kids who were kicked out for something out of their control. He knew it was just something to get under his skin, to make him angry and defensive.

Instead, it just made Tim hurt and even more tired.

“It’s none of your business!” Tim burst out, his mouth turned down in anger and brows pulled tight against his forehead. “Why can’t you just mind your own stupid business!”

Jason gave a little hop, not at all threatened by Tim’s burst of anger, and that just made him even *madder*-

“ *Again*, you’re in my fucking territory so that means,” Jason stepped closer, pressing his chest to Tim’s and lording his height over him. “ *I Can. Ask. Whatever. I. Want* ”

“It was a personal family matter-” Tim gritted out, shaking hands behind his back, digging their nails into his sweater to stop them from doing something stupid. “That means it doesn’t involve *you*.”

Suddenly Jason’s face lost all amusement.

Tim froze, tension and a cold feeling settled in his gut as he immediately stepped back and wished (not for the first time) that he’d taken one of his spare bo staffs.

It was like they were standing in the eye of a hurricane. Everything was calm, quiet, so eerily still. Tim didn’t even have to process what he said to know he misstepped.

“Listen you little *brat*,” Jason began, expression dark as he took a full step closer to Tim, following him. “You are nowhere *near* hot enough to talk to me like that, so watch the *fuckin’ tone* will you?”

*‘Hey! Watch the language!’ Bruce had looked so aged but his gaze had a sharpened focus of disapproval locked onto Tim’*

Tim wanted to say something. Wanted to say something back because why was everyone so intent on ganging up on him today? First Damian, then Bruce, then Dick showed up in his motel after he had made it clear *he wanted to be left alone-*

Now Jason. Jason marched into his room and rubbed lemons into the still-fresh wounds Tim could feel stinging him. It *burned* him to stay quiet. To clench his jaw and dig his teeth into his tongue until it hurt so he wouldn’t say anything.

Jason was letting him stay (it wasn’t even technically his territory). Jason was being nice, being civil-

*‘Could you just try to be civil to Damian, Timmy?’ Dick asked, pleading. ‘Please? For me? Just be nice to him for a few hours and we’ll get ice cream on the way back, okay?’*

Tim felt his shaking hands clench tighter into the thick fabric of his sweater.

Jason hadn’t meant anything by his words, he hadn’t. He was just being an ass- just trying to get under Tim’s skin. So Tim shouldn’t have said that to him, tried to throw back a low blow *just to make him hurt too (besides look how well that strategy worked out for him, he was in a roach-infested motel because of it-)*.

“I’m sorry .” Tim forced out. “I...” He paused, mouth dry, “-that wasn’t civil of me, I know you’re being nice by...by letting me stay so,” Tim pursed his lips. “I’m sorry.”

Jason’s expression remained stony. His hands still held a tight grip on his grocery bag.

Tim stayed still, acting like he was just a pathetic lump of a boy sitting in front of Jason. Just a stupid boy who didn’t know anything and let his stupid mouth run faster than his nonexistent brain. Jason should feel bad for such a boy, shouldn’t he.

Jason scoffed. He raised an unimpressed brow, a breath pushing out of his mouth like he was blowing out cigar smoke.

“Whatever.”

Jason turned around, leaving Tim behind without another word.

Tim was forced to close the door behind him after he left.

Sir Dicksalot was still standing pretty in the lot when Jason made his way down. Jason forced the angry tension in his body to unravel as he made his way down.

He couldn't have the stupid, fat bunny anxiously waiting for him beside a line of choppable cars think that Jason was anything but happy at his misfortune.

*'You see?'* Jason made an open hand motion with his arms. *'Kid is untouched like I said'*

Though he'd really been pushing his luck with that last snotty comment.

Dick watched him uneasily from across the lot, hands shoved into his denim jacket as Jason continued on his merry way. He was making little hesitating steps like he wanted to step forward but reconsidering it like entering the lot would be crossing some invisible line and upsetting the little shrimp upstairs.

Jason figured it'd be a while before the older boy felt secure enough in Jason's words to leave, especially if he saw that Jason remained in the area. In the meantime, Jason turned a corner wall of concrete separating the parking lot from the front offices. There was a wall of shrubbery blocking all the windows from looking out onto the lot and Jason took the opportunity to pull out his phone and dial the phone number posted up on the sun awning.

Jason didn't have his helmet's voice modifier but he'd long since made sure all business owners in the area recognized his voice.

Jason heard as the phone inside began to ring.

"Night and Dawn Motel, Sharice speaking."

Jason felt another grin slide onto his face.

"Hey there Sharice, remember me?"

A sudden sharp intake of breath filled Jason's ears as the woman on the line stuttered a greeting, nerves palpable from the other side of a pane of glass and bushes.



“Calm down, creampie I just got a request for your lovely establishment- you know the kid that checked into Room 207?”

Jason heard frantic nodding hitting the receiver followed by stuttered words.

“Y-yeah, little breadstick of a boy? Black and blue, came with a big bag, he paid cash.”

Jason grunted his affirmative.

“Yeah, him, do me a favor and charge him triple for every night he stays, got it?”

“A-Absolutely sir!” The woman on the other end assured. “Whatever you say, Mr. Hood, it's always a pleasure working with you!”

Jason grunted out an agreeing sound before ending the call just as fast as he'd started it.

*‘It was a personal family matter- that means it doesn’t involve you.’*

*‘This doesn’t even have anything to do with you- ’*

The silver-spoon runt wouldn't even notice having to cough up a few hundred more than this shitstain of a motel was worth.

But the thought of sticking one to him soothed the burning roar of Jason's soul.

He'd be running back to his thousand thread count bed and weeping into Grayson's bitch tits before the sun was down anyway. No kid raised like the shrimp had it in them to stick it out in a place like Crime Alley, a few blocks out or not.

The first night spent in the motel was an uncomfortable one. There was a space between the bottom of the door and the entrance, leaving a gap wide enough to allow a cold draft to come into the room. Tim had tried closing it by stuffing some old shirts and pants under it.

The idea of his information and room number being handed out to anyone with a free twenty to offer the concierge was enough for Tim to try and up the paltry security of his room. He ended up using a broken hunk of countertop tile to drive a wedge under the door along with forcing both bedside dressers in front of the door to serve as a barricade.

Tim still wasn't able to rest easy, leaving the lamps of the room on and tensing at every small noise he heard. Someone was loudly playing an action movie with lots of gunfire two doors down. Another person upstairs kept opening and slamming their door shut, sending vibrations down Tim's door.

Tim didn't sleep well.

In the morning, Tim had a decision to make.

The vending machine he got his dinner out of had spit out a few quarters in change, enough for him to be able to place a call at the phone booth at the end of the block.

Tim had seen it on the first day when he'd made his way over to the motel office to request a room. It was a rusty, broken-down thing. The hinges had left the door half jammed and the back of the booth had glass littered on the floor of it. There was no guarantee it even worked but it was the only hope Tim had unless he wanted to wander into Crime Alley at night. *(Jason, Jason lived in Crime Alley, Jason only granted him permission to remain at the motel for a bit but if he caught him in Crime Alley with his pants down he'd-).*

Tim didn't want to do that without having some kind of protection. Unfortunately, he'd forgotten the pepper spray along with about a million of his things back at the manor, including his phone.

Bruce was the type to memorize each and every one of his contacts. Home numbers, cell numbers, work numbers- all of it was probably stored in that big brain alongside every drop of useful and useless bit of information he knew. Tim, however, was not.

So there went Ives, there went Bernard. There went any of his High School friends who'd be concerned and confused as to why he needed a place to crash but would respect his wish to not ask questions.

Tim could call Jeremy, his mom's former accountant, and see if he could get an update on any of her properties and the status of her finances. Tim had been able to easily pull up the website of the company he worked for alongside his office number. But it was the weekend, there was a big chance Tim's call would go straight through to an answering machine, and then what? Was he going to wait beside the payphone all of Monday in case the office called back?

He could call the storage facility where his dad had put all the

furniture and his mom's old things when they'd downsized to their apartment in Mooney Towers. Tim was sure there was an address book with every number he could need stored within one of the drawers somewhere. But it would take time, to search through them. Not to mention the bus fare and the fact that he'd need to make it to Coral District all the way across town to reach them.

Wait. Did Tim even have the key to the locker?

Okay well, there went that plan. Tim was sure his dad had been left with lots of condolences and 'call me if you ever need anything' words at his mother's funeral. Tim had been too into his grief at the time to remember any faces aside from a few he recognized from the yearly company Christmas party his parents took him to.

But Tim hadn't seen, spoken to, or even been acquainted with any of them in years. He was sure after the company went bankrupt few of them even stuck around in Gotham anyway. Aside from maybe Phil Marin who was working as an investment manager somewhere in Midtown, but dad had hated him for some reason. Tim never listened long enough to find out why.

There was little chance any of them had actually meant it. None of them had even shown up for his father's funeral.

So Tim was on his own.

On his own, until the Titans returned from their mission. It wasn't ideal, dragging personal problems to the tower. Tim had endured a thousand lectures from Batman, Nightwing, Cyborg, and just about every hero he knew about leaving personal stuff at the door.

But Tim had very few other options. At the tower, he would at least have a secured living space so long as he joined the team on missions. He'd have a secure and stable internet connection.

Tim glared down at the webpage on his computer that was still loading from the motel's free wifi.

Food and water.

Tim repressed a grimace and dusted off wafer crackers and Cheeto crumbs off his pants. Plus with the number of times rogues had attempted to poison the city's water treatment facility, Tim wouldn't trust the tap water in Gotham any further than he could throw it.

Also, Tim didn't need to have Conner, Cassie, or Bart's numbers memorized to reach them- the Titans had a non-emergency report line that he could use to leave a message with his access code. For that, all he needed was a phone they could call him on when they were ready to pick him up.

But that could take weeks. Deep space missions hardly followed an itinerary so nobody would be scrambling to get back.

Plus who knew how long Jason's goodwill would last. If the older vigilante decided to pay a midnight visit Tim needed at least some kind of proof that he was working on getting out of his territory.

Tim tensed at the idea, eyes landing on the newspaper he'd nicked from the front office when the concierge hadn't been looking. It was advertising for roommates and nearby rental listings. All of which were cheaper than the flight to California that would take him to the tower. That is if he even managed to board the plane without his passport.

Okay, Tim had this. Tim was by Otisburg which was sure to have plenty of pawnshops and mobile stores. If he could get his hands on a pay-per-use phone he'd have a secure line he could call Jeremy from and also be able to leave a message for the Titans. While he was at it a mobile router would probably be good.

Did those cost a lot?

Tim paused in thought. They were incredibly useful to have so that had to mean lots of people bought them. If something was popular and sold well that meant it would be cheaper, wouldn't it?

Tim would have to check on that.

He hadn't taken any documents like his birth certificate that was stored in Bruce's office. All he had was an old school ID, a library card, and an ATM card in his wallet.

But the ATM card was the one his dad had given him so he could withdraw money to buy lunch at his school. Tim wasn't even sure if the account it was connected to was still *open*.

Okay, okay it was fine.

Tim could manage this, it was fine. Just so long as he budgeted carefully he could make it to the end of the week if he watched how

much he spent on vending machine snacks. The chips were an extra twenty-five cents more than the cookies. But the sodas were all a dollar less than the snacks.

Looks like he'd be having ginger ale for breakfast, lunch, and dinner until he could get his hands on some real funds.

There was a bank account with his name on it somewhere he knew it- Jeremy would probably be able to get Tim access and Tim wouldn't even have to prove to him that he was himself.

But would Jeremy charge him? There were consultation fees for that sort of thing weren't there? If it was anything more than a hundred it would really screw with Tim's tentative budget. Tim was still under eighteen, there were limits to what he could do.

He'd danced with the idea of visiting the banks and signing up for a few dozen credit cards in order to get the signing bonus cash but everything online had said he needed a bunch of papers, a verifiable income, and an adult.

*Bruce would've gone with him. But Bruce didn't want him, he was doing this because Bruce didn't want him.*

Tim had none of those unless he was willing to pay one of those shady people that'd he'd seen talking to the concierge when he checked in to pretend to be an older family member.

Well, now there was an idea Tim could put on the backburner.

It was okay, it was fine. Tim had things under control. He had a tentative plan and a direction to go in.

One, get a phone.

Two, call people.

Three, get more money.

Four, get out of the motel before Jason remembered that he hated Tim.

*Bruce didn't want him, he was doing this because Bruce didn't want him.*

Okay, it was okay. Tim had this handled. It was fine. He was fine.

The sound of the door upstairs slamming shut shook Tim's fragile door

hard enough to dislodge one of the shirts stuffed under it. The sharp howl of wind from outside met Tim's ears and he wrapped himself tighter in the scratchy blankets of the motel bed.

His hands were already shivering and he could feel his nose sniffing from the cold.

*Bruce didn't want him, he was doing this because Bruce didn't want him.*

It was fine, he was fine.

As soon as he looked up the transportation schedule, Tim would get on a bus to Otisburg, he'd leave Jeremy a message on his answering machine and Tim would be in a warm apartment with a fireplace, deadbolts on the door, and windows that didn't let in the cold.

He was fine. He was fine.

*Bruce didn't want him, he was doing this because Bruce didn't want him.*

Tim was going to be fine.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!